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ITS AIMS AND TENDENCIES

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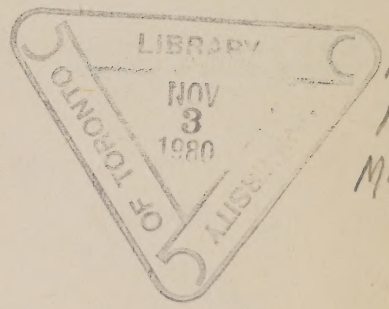

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CHAPTER I

MUSIC AND LIFE: A NEW ATTITUDE

It is impossible to ignore certain changes that have affected the musician's attitude towards his art, and consequently his methods of expression, during the period in which romanticism in music has gradually given way to realism.

As always, these type-names must have merely a general, and not a precise, significance; but nevertheless they are convenient inasmuch as they do stand for certain characteristic features in artistic development, and have come to be universally accepted in that sense. But, for all that, they remain essentially labels, useful for reference, but conveying no real information about the inner nature of the art to which they are applied. As long as this is clearly understood, however,

there is no harm in describing the artistic output of a great many individual composers during a certain period as "Classical," while the work of another whole period is described as "Romantic," and that of a third as "Realistic." For by the first of these terms is understood, primarily, obedience to, and reverence for, the abstract laws of Form; by the second, rejection of the letter in favour of the spirit—purely human aspiration asserting itself against the tyranny of formulæ and refusing to be bound; and by the third, a passion for truth leading to the overthrow of sentimentalism, and a desire to bring art into a closer relation with life. All three of these phases are perfectly comprehensible, and follow each other with the inevitableness of natural phenomena. In art, as in nature, everything indeed points to evolution. Misunderstood as that term may be, yet to a world that perceives its own growth it will always make some appeal. Man's mental development (using the word to include his more specifically artistic faculties) may be compared to the growth of a snake, which only attains to maturity by the sloughing of successive skins.

No more than the snake, does man, as he emerges into each new state, perceive the whole significance of the change. But impartial observers who look back upon his achievements from the standpoint which their forerunners enabled them to attain, may see and appreciate the whole advance. In art especially is it true that each successive generation owes much to the one that went before, from whose failures it learns no less than from its successes. At the same time, the whole point about artistic progress is that it cannot be considered in isolation from all the other various forms of human activity and emotions in the same way, for example, that a boy's learning of the multiplication table or any other branch of science may be looked upon as a definite addition to his store of knowledge, externally acquired. Progress of this kind has a definite end in view, namely, something to be learnt, and the learner's attitude towards this goal is assumed to be unchanging. But in artistic progress, change in methods or ideals is brought about by change in the attitude of successive generations of people and of individuals towards the problem of art.

Each age wants something different, or is more deeply interested in certain aspects of things than the age that went before it; hence it creates for itself a new type. It is not that there is a final form of art which each generation of men comes a little nearer to attaining, while they are assumed to be all of one mind as to the object of their endeavours; rather, the essence and mystery of art is that it represents the search of the human spirit after an ideal that is always changing and is never really the same for two individuals, much less for a whole generation. But yet there are periods when the bulk of mankind or of a nation is interested in certain aspects of things more than in others, and then its art will correspond to its desires. So that finally, all that progress in art (apart from mere technique) can mean is the adaptation of methods to new ideals.

For example, the increasing tendency to connect music with things other than itself—literature, painting, the dance—is a typically modern one. It began with the 19th century Romantics (Schumann, Chopin, Weber, etc.), received a stronger impetus from Wagner and

Liszt, and culminated in the tone-poems of Strauss, the realistic music-dramas of Moussorgsky, the ballets of Stravinsky, and the mystical or metaphysical compositions of Scriabine. It would, of course, be a mistake to group these composers together on account of any individual resemblances; all they have in common is a certain preoccupation with different aspects of human life and thought which each interprets according to his own æsthetics and through the medium of music. The artist is already ceasing to be only a craftsman, keeping his art in one water-tight compartment and all his ordinary human interests in another.

The classic tendency was to treat art as an end in itself[1] (Oscar Wilde was a classic at heart); the Romantic tendency (subjective) was to treat it above all as a medium for self-expression, as a kind of emotional safety-valve; the modern tendency is to use art as a kind of spiritual camera to photograph

[1] We are here in the sphere of generalities; the above is broadly true; classical music is not often "emotional" in the romantic sense, though of course is far from being devoid of feeling. (Beethoven cannot be counted as a classic.)

external facts and register the impressions received from them as impersonally and objectively as possible. Meanwhile the purely technical and material resources of all the arts are being systematically exploited and enriched, while the boundaries between the different branches (literature, painting, music, dancing) are no longer as clearly defined as they were.

Thus the first characteristic symptom of modernity makes its appearance, and the literary or human interest (with the influence of which upon music I shall endeavour to deal more fully in Chap. II) begins to exercise its sway.

Secondly, the revival of dancing, which has been so marked a feature of the twentieth century, has brought a new spirit into music and enlarged its possibilities as an emotional art more than has ever been possible before. This influence, by laying special stress on the purely plastic and rhythmic nature of music, acts as a wholesome safeguard against the possible over-intellectualization of the art, while, at the same time, it saves it from becoming too literary or realistic, and thus forsaking its

proper sphere which is, after all, and must ever remain, the domain of pure sound. In this way dancing, and especially the Diaghilew Ballet, has brought new life into music and given real inspiration to several new composers. Indeed, it has been the peculiar privilege of the Russian Ballet, through the genius of men like Nijinsky, Fokine, Bakst, and Stravinsky, to unite music, painting and the dance in an ideal combination, and so to point the way to a new theatre where the three arts shall reign together and mutually support each other to the great and lasting benefit of each individually.

All this goes to show that modernism in music manifests itself not so much by innovations in method (advances in the technique of writing and harmonic developments are, after all, inevitable) as by the growth of a new attitude towards music as a whole, foreshadowing a future for it that shall be bright with new conquests and lead to the linking up of the art with all that is best in modern culture. The following pages are an attempt to define the nature of this new attitude and the various forms in which it manifests itself in the music of to-day.

It is indeed a far cry from a Bach fugue or a Lully Overture to a Scriabine Symphony or a Stravinsky Ballet, but there are many mansions in the palace of music, and there is happily no need to fear lest they should be overcrowded.

CHAPTER II

MUSIC AND LITERATURE

It would be rash to try and fix with any exactitude a date or period during which music shows for the first time traces of direct literary influence. By literary influence I mean the influence of literary ideas. Mere contact between music and literature had, of course, been established ever since the youngest of the arts was in her cradle.

The choruses of the ancient Greek tragedies were certainly sung to music of a kind; Western music as we know it now owes its very existence to the use it was put to by the Churches; indeed, all the earliest music known to us is invariably wedded to a text of some kind, either sacred, as in the Church services, or profane (e.g., the troubadors). Vocal music, in fact, was the sole form then known. It was

only at a much later date, when instruments were being invented and gradually perfected, that the notion of "absolute" music—i.e., music without words, standing alone and self-sufficient—even began to enter people's heads.

It will be seen, then, that music has from the first been closely connected with, and indeed was at one time inseparable from, "literature" in this sense (i.e., the spoken word), but it was not until after they had won their emancipation and had learnt to walk alone that musicians began (roughly at about the beginning of the nineteenth century) to turn again to literature, this time of their own free will, and with a different end in view. We are now no longer concerned with the mere setting of words to music; we enter here upon a new phase—a phase in which musicians opened their minds to all that was being accomplished in other fields of human activity, and began to express in their music the same kind of ideas and sensations as the poets and writers and thinkers were expressing in verse.

The most obvious example of this type of musician is Richard Wagner. At the opposite pole is the type of the "musician's musician,"

Mozart. Nothing could better illustrate the distinction I am trying to establish between the non-literary type of eighteenth century musician and the literary type of the nineteenth than a comparison between the childhoods of Mozart and Wagner. From the age of four the former was already consecrated to music and music alone, whereas it is significant that up to the age of fifteen at least the young Wagner dreamed only of being a poet, and had already at least one Shakespearean tragedy to his credit before he was out of his teens. By a mere chance, as it were, music finally claimed him as her own, but his literary output was nevertheless only less voluminous than his musical, and much of the latter is definitely coloured by the composer's preoccupation with philosophic and æsthetic theory. The influence of Nietzsche, for example, is too obvious to need recalling here. What do we hear, however, of the influence of, say, Leibnitz upon Mozart, or of Descartes upon Couperin? Eighteenth century musicians lived in a world of their own to a greater extent than is perhaps generally realised. No doubt the change in the status

of artists generally that accompanied the diffusion of democratic ideas at the beginning of, and during the nineteenth century, naturally led musicians to acquire a wider outlook, and made it easier for them to steep themselves in the general culture of their time. Many of the most typical nineteenth century composers—both before and after Wagner—were men of varied interests who often combined literature and music, either doubling the rôles of critic and composer, as, for example, Schumann and Berlioz, or else being their own librettists, as were Wagner and Moussorgsky.

Schumann, in spite of (or rather, perhaps, on account of) his extremely romantic temperament, was a very literary musician. Not only did he edit a musical journal for ten years (" Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik ") but he was perhaps the first composer deliberately to write music illustrative of his literary ideas and theories. The introduction of " Florestan " and " Eusebius " (representing the critical and impulsive sides of his own personality, and first employed in his prose writings as a kind of critical pseudonym) into his actual compositions (e.g., the F sharp minor Sonata, and

" Carnival ") was a real innovation, and, unless we are to look upon it as nothing but a romantic pose, certainly betrays a very highly developed self-consciousness, and at the same time a critical detachment which is rare in musical psychology.

Other devices such as the musical portraiture[1] of " Carnival " and the musical polemics of the " Davidsbündlertänze " and the " March of the Davidites against the Philistines," are not only typical of Schumann, they are also typical of his age. At a time when new ideas were in the air, no artist, whether he were poet, or musician, or painter, could remain insensible to them, and instinctively men took sides, groups and parties were formed, and literary or musical " schools " came into being. Since that day, the old-fashioned type of periwigged composer who, as often as not, knew nothing, and was not expected to know anything, outside his own particular art, has definitely disappeared. His place is taken by a new and interesting

[1] Musical portraiture was not, however, an innovation of Schumann's. Couperin had already practised it, taking as his models the ladies and gentlemen at the court of Louis XIV, e.g., " La Fine Madelon," " La Douce Jeanneton," etc.

race of musicians whose general education is as carefully polished as their musical style, and whose art is open to influences as diverse as the theories of Einstein or the rhythmic possibilities of "jazz." The self-consciousness and emotionalism of the 19th century has been supplanted by the airy indifference and universalism of the twentieth. While the Romantics dreaded not being taken seriously enough, a certain ultra-modern school to-day dreads nothing so much as being taken seriously at all. Reactions, however, are healthy, and are generally a proof of vitality.

We have seen, then, how the music of the early nineteenth century was fertilised by contact with ideas in general, and especially with literature, and how this relationship was destined to endure, and is still a feature of the music of to-day. Indeed, it may be said that almost every literary "movement" of any importance during the last century has been reflected in a similar "movement" in the world of music. Just as Romanticism in literature had its musical counterpart, so also did Realism. Similarly, the Impressionist movement, which later gained such an ascendancy

both in painting and literature, left its mark on music, too. Before, however, considering the various aspects of this latter phase, with its interesting analogies between words, colours and sounds, the question of realism in art, and especially in music (to which I have just referred) needs some elucidation.

The word realism has been a source of much confusion, and is generally misused by critics when applied to art. Two kinds of realism may be distinguished; a realism inherent in the subject, and a realism inherent in the treatment or artistic presentation of a subject. One kind of realism is that achieved by Zola in his novels of peasant and industrial life—a realism which is due at least as much to selection of subject as to the actual literary method; while another kind of realism is that of, e.g., Dostoïevsky, who, not content with mere photography, is mainly concerned with the true "reality" underlying the ordinary acts and emotions of humanity.

From the point of view of æsthetics the realism of the subject-matter is irrelevant; the term "realist" in art can only be applied to the means employed by the artist to express, no

matter what subject; and a realist is one who seeks a form of expression which shall be the most exact counterpart of the subject by which he is inspired, or rather of the original emotion aroused in him by that subject. In order to do this he will discard generalizations in favour of a method which will be as nearly as possible a *transcription* of his actual impressions, and not a *translation*, in whatever medium he may be working. That is to say, the stylistic conventions of that medium will be reduced to a minimum; the transference of the emotional content of the subject-matter of the artist's inspiration will be effected, as it were, without an intermediary. Such an art dissipates as little as possible of its original impelling motive *en route* from creator to spectator; and therefore gains in vividness and truth.

Obviously realism can be more easily practised in literature and painting, but it is also possible in music—if not in "pure" music (so-called in the sense of purely instrumental music) at least in music when allied to words. The greatest realist in music is

Moussorgsky.[1] The extraordinary vividness of his music and the directness of its emotional appeal is due to the fact that Moussorgsky's genius lay, not in devising new musical patterns or combinations, but in his capacity for welding musical material into an instrument for registering, or rather transcribing, human emotions as literally as possible. He is not concerned with finding formulæ; his music contains no mannerisms applied again and again to meet with certain situations; he invents a new equivalent to express each one as it occurs. In short, his genius is realist in the true sense of the word, and as such is more concerned with the exact transcription of a given emotion than with generalizations designed to suggest that emotion, but whose form is mainly determined by certain conventions attaching to the medium which is being used.

No better example of the peculiar "directness" of Moussorgsky's style and of his

[1] For the whole question of realism in art, see pp. 70-73 in M. D. Calvocoressi's penetrating study, "Moussorgsky" (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., English translation), (Paris : Felix Alcan).

wonderful power of obtaining a maximum of dramatic intensity with the greatest economy of means could be instanced than the scene in the Lithuanian inn, in the first act of "Boris." Varlaam's drunken song is a masterpiece in itself, but the swift climax which closes the act, beginning from the passage where Varlaam spells out the warrant for the arrest of Grigori, with its breathless ascending sequence of steady crotchets against the nervous, bustling accompaniment, and culminating in Grigori's dash through the window, is a marvellous example of what can be accomplished with apparently the simplest technical apparatus, allied to a terseness which is far more effective than the most ingenious elaboration could ever be.

Such realism as this is only possible, then, in music, which is primarily dramatic, for "absolute" music represents nothing but itself, and is related to nothing outside itself.

Impressionism, on the other hand, can be either subjective or objective, but is more likely to be the former. The object of impressionism is to create an "atmosphere," that of realism to portray the "thing itself."

The difference between the two techniques is like the generic difference between painting and photography: the one is essentially a reconstruction (subjective), the other an imitation (objective). Nevertheless, paradoxically enough, impressionism in painting owed its origin to a desire for greater scientific precision, and the first impressionists were concerned above all to bring their painting into line with certain definite scientific laws relating to light and the refraction of the sun's rays. Monet's studies of the Cathedral of Rouen seen first of all in shade and then in sunlight,[1] are definitely impressionistic in their technique, but in a sense they are also realistic—that is to say, they are not a transformation of the subject governed purely by arbitrary laws of abstract harmony (such as certain of the "Nocturnes" or Symphonies of Whistler), but a representation of a certain aspect of the subject as it actually appeared to the artist.

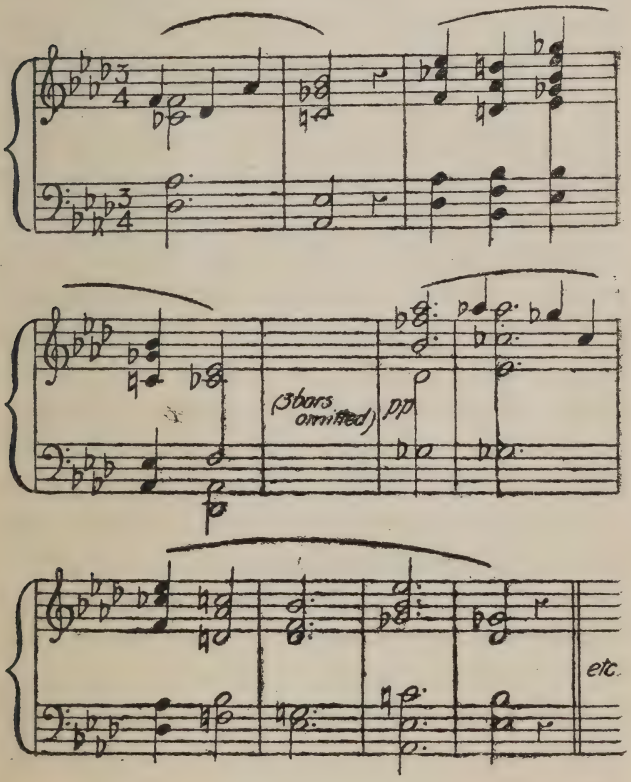
This impressionistic style, as is well known, quickly became the fashion among painters, especially in France, and, by a natural transition, soon began to have an influence upon

[1] Louvre.

music. It only remained to translate the impressionist theory from terms of light to terms of sound, and for musicians to proceed to put it into practice. Blurred outlines were soon found to be just as feasible in music as in painting, and the scintillating effects of sunlight found their counterpart in shimmering harmonies and the skilfully blended vibrations of "upper partials." Just as the painters "decomposed" a ray of light, so did musicians split up the "fundamental" into its numerous sonorous component parts. In this connection the name of Claude Debussy as the first composer to employ the impressionist technique inevitably presents itself; it may be remarked in parenthesis, however, that it is probable that Erik Satie was actually the first to employ the kind of harmonies which, after him, Debussy made so characteristically his own. Thus, instances of the use of sequences of consecutive ninths, which are so marked a feature of the Debussyist technique, are to be found in the compositions of Satie, as early as 1887[1],

[1] i.e., seven years before the composition of the "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune" and three years before the earliest piano pieces of Debussy. The obvious influence of Franck upon Satie at this period must, however, not be overlooked.

c.f. the following passage from Sarabande No. 1 (1887):—(Ex. 1)



(The reasons which eventually led Satie to abandon impressionism and evolve his present

characteristic style need not be gone into here; I reserve, however, for a later chapter a more detailed analysis of the methods of this striking and original composer, who in certain of his compositions has reduced *naïveté* to a fine art, but whose "Socrate," for its qualities of dignity and severity and purity of outline, must be ranked as a masterpiece of musical portraiture).

While all this, then, was going on in painting and music, a similar movement was taking place in literature. The last decades of the 19th century saw the growth of the literary counterpart of impressionism, namely, Symbolism. Writers like Mallarmé and Rimbaud were handling words in much the same way as the painters and musicians were treating light and sound. They constructed their sentences on an almost purely musical basis, aiming not only at broad rhythmic effects, but also at the establishment of a regular harmonic system in which vowels and consonants should play the part of notes in a chord, with cadences, resolutions, and other refinements borrowed from musical technique. The Symbolists also aimed at visual effects, and by the skilful

isolation of rare and vivid words, scattered here and there like jewels, sought to evoke, by the association of ideas, a host of suggestive images. Rimbaud, indeed, as is well known, went so far as to invest the vowels with colour —"A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O bleu, U vert." "Je réglai," he says, "la forme et le mouvement de chaque consonne, et, avec des rhythmes instinctifs, je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens."[1]

Since, therefore, the actual techniques of music and literature had thus been brought nearer than ever before, it was only natural that, while the poets were borrowing from music, composers on the other hand should have shewn themselves to be especially sensitive to contemporary literature. The fine flower of impressionism was soon to blossom into perfection, when Debussy, inspired by Mallarmé, by Verlaine, and later by the symbolism of Maeterlinck, produced that jewelled masterpiece, the "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un

[1] "*Une Saison en enfer*" ("Alchimie du Verbe").

Faune," the immortal settings of Verlaine, and the mystic "Pelléas et Mélisande."

The shimmer and sheen of Mallarmé's "L'après-midi d'un Faune" lives again in Debussy's wonderful Prelude; the peculiar poignant remoteness of Maeterlinckian romance has been wonderfully rendered in the music to "Pelléas"; and in the settings of Verlaine's lyrics and thumbnail sketches, the poet's caprice of the movement is caught and fixed in sound, as it were, the musical setting being simply a translation into sound, instantaneously carried out, of the very essence and spirit of the words.

The union of music and literature was thus finally consecrated by Debussy, whose settings have probably never been equalled for their extraordinary sensitiveness to the mood and intentions of the poet; but the besetting sin of the whole movement of this period was preciousness or preciosity, and the impressionist technique, having been exploited by a host of imitators, has now definitely fallen into discredit.

It was a perfect instrument for the

expression of certain sentiments, and above all for the creation of a certain atmosphere :—

> " Je devine à travers un murmure
> Le contour subtil des voix anciennes
> Et dans les lueurs musiciennes
> Amour pâle, une aurore future."
>
> (*Verlaine, Romances sans Paroles*)

but, after all, this atmosphere, like that of a hothouse, or the rarified air of high mountains, cannot be breathed indefinitely, and sooner or later the pendulum was bound to swing, and so to-day we find ourselves in the heyday of an anti-impressionist reaction. Contemporary music is still literary in inspiration, but the literature which inspires it has changed its character since the days of symbolism. It is the object of these pages to attempt an analysis of the salient characteristics of the modern movement to-day, but in order to do so it will be necessary, first of all, to examine in detail a few of its more striking manifestations.

CHAPTER III

HARMONIC INNOVATIONS

It may be remarked at the outset that modern music does not recognise any "rules" of harmony. Indeed, even in the past, the so-called "rules" have invariably been more honoured in the breach than in the observance, and, therefore, the only people likely to regret the present state of affairs are those whose profession it is to compile text-books on the subject.

There will, nevertheless, always be room for critical analyses of harmonic "faits accomplis," which may be illuminating and of interest to technicians—but the theoreticians can no longer even pretend to exercise the slightest influence upon the actual practice of musicians. The utmost they can do is to "constater"—after the event—and endeavour (as best they can) to account for what they see (or hear). The job, however, is a thankless

one—hence the marked decrease in recent years of purely theoretical works on music.[1]

Absolute harmonic freedom, then, must now be taken for granted; the tendency of modern music is, as we have seen, to come more and more into line with life, experience, and general culture—in a word, to attain to a wider range of expression. Hence all means which may facilitate this process have come to be considered legitimate.

Harmonic freedom means that music is becoming fully articulate; indeed, the question inevitably suggests itself—why should only certain sounds, or only certain kinds of sounds be permitted to an art whose rightful province is the whole of auditive experience? Any combination of musical, and also nominally "un-musical," sounds should therefore be, and in fact now is, permissible, and even the introduction of noises into a musical score has already been successfully carried out. As an

[1] A notable exception, however, is Arnold Schönberg's "Harmonielehre" (1911), which is interesting as a revelation of the theoretic views of one of the boldest of modern musical practitioners, and among French books on the subject René Lenormand's "Etude sur l'Harmonie moderne" (1912, Paris) is an excellent example of the deductive method, and contains numerous quotations from modern compositions.

instance of the use of "noise" by a contemporary composer, the percussion passages in Darius Milhaud's "Les Choéphores" and "L'Homme et son Désir" may be cited. The effect obtained is one of remarkable power, and the grimness of the Aeschylean text is undoubtedly enhanced by the use, in "Les Choéphores," of whips and hammers and whistles which, combined with the groanings of the chorus, help to create an impression of foreboding and threatening disaster which it would probably have been impossible to obtain by the use of purely musical means. If it be objected that it is the musician's business to confine himself to music, and not to encroach upon the domain of noise, the answer is that the boundary between the two, like the boundary between verse and prose, is not so easy to define, and that if noise be subjected to the laws of rhythm (as in the instance cited) its use by a musician is justified.

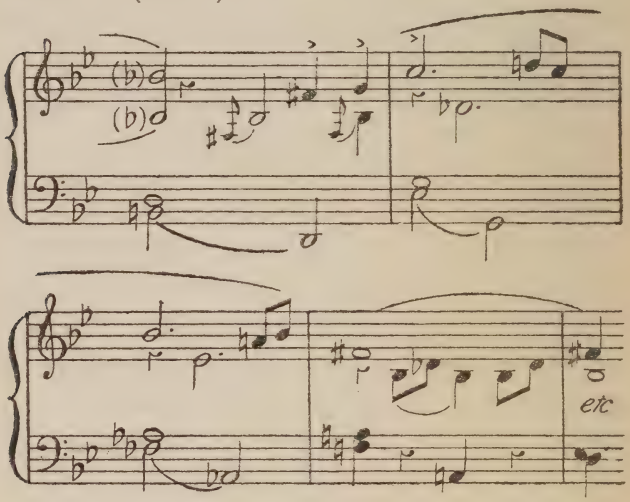
Moreover, if it be the object of music to "express," there can be no doubt that since composers have shaken off the last fetters which hung about their art, the expressive powers of music have been enormously

increased. No other art has ever been hampered by prejudices and preconceived ideas to the same extent as music. Indeed, musicians are only now beginning to enjoy that freedom which the painters have long since won for themselves—and even now "audacities" in music seem to arouse greater hostility on the part of the general public than do similar "audacities" in painting. The education of the eye, in fact, would seem to be greatly in advance of the education of the ear. (And yet, as Jean Cocteau remarks in his "Cock and Harlequin," "the ear repudiates, but can tolerate, certain kinds of music which, if transferred to the sphere of the nose, would oblige us to run away.") Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made, and there are virtually no limits now to the degree of harmonic licence which a composer may allow himself.

The examples which follow here have been chosen, not with a view to critical analysis, but rather in order to show the impossibility of applying any strict analysis to the free harmonic writing of the day. Nevertheless, for the purposes of a rough classification it may be observed that the principal harmonic innova-

tions of the post-impressionist period are:—(1) Polytony, or the juxtaposition of alien tonalities; (2) a-tonality, or the abandonment of any recognisable key; (3) an extreme form of polyphony (contrapuntal independence pushed to its logical conclusion).

The works of several modern French composers, notably those belonging to the group known as the "Six," abound in instances of polytony. The following passage occurs in "Adieu New York," Fox Trot, by Georges Auric[1]:—(Ex. 2)



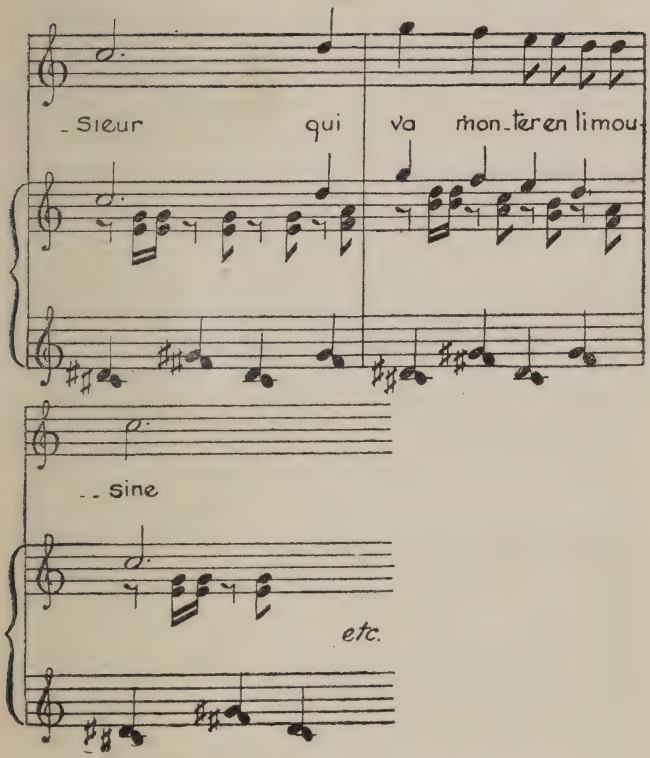
[1] Editions "La Sirène," Paris, 1920.

An interesting and beautiful example of polytony can be seen in Bela Bartok's "Bagatellen" (Op. 6) No. 1, which begins as follows:—(Ex. 3)

and continues to the end in the same way, the right hand playing throughout in the key of C sharp minor and the left hand in that of A flat major, (or F minor?).

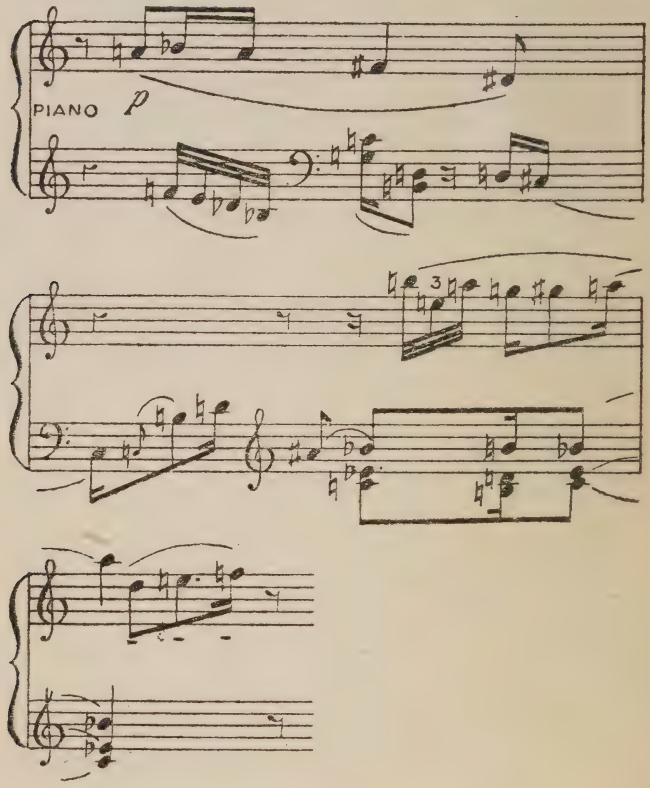
The following passage from Darius Milhaud's "Monsieur Protopopoff" (Les Soirées de Petrograde, Ed. Durand et Cie, Paris, 1919) is a good example of polytony:—

(Ex. 4)



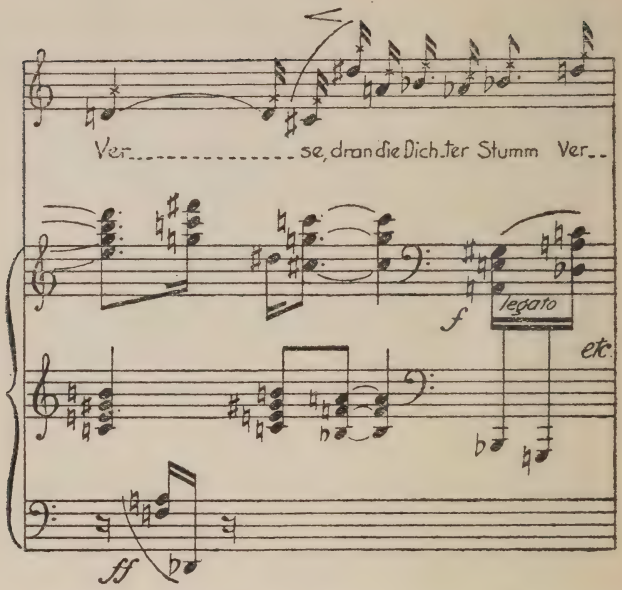
It is evident that in a sense polytony and a-tonality are alike in so far as both are characterised by the absence of any one prevailing key; but in well-defined examples of polytony it is generally possible to distinguish at least two conflicting tonalities. Some music, however, is strictly a-tonal, and many examples

could be cited from the works of, amongst others, Schönberg and Stravinsky. Schönberg's "Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke" (Op. 19) for example, are entirely a-tonal. The following passage occurs in No. 1 of these short pieces :—(Ex. 5)



Still more striking as regards its completely a-tonal character is the same composer's "Pierrot Lunaire," for voice, piano, violin, viola, 'cello, flute and clarinet. The following is the opening phrase of "Die Kreuze" (No. 14 of the above song-cycle)[1] :—(Ex. 6)

[1] The crosses on the notes in the voice part signify that they are to be spoken rather than sung. This direction applies to the whole of "Pierrot Lunaire," to which we shall have occasion to refer in a subsequent chapter.



Many passages in Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps" and "Le Rossignol" are a-tonal in character, but with Stravinsky one feels that tonality is generally sacrificed in the cause of rhythmic freedom, the "dynamic" element in his works seeming generally of greater importance and significance than the purely harmonic. With Schönberg, however, this rhythmic interest is almost entirely lacking; the real basis of the Schönbergian system is

contrapuntal and polyphonic; and the doctrine of complete independence for each "voice," which he pushes to extreme limits, naturally results in the abolition of tonality and thence (in some cases) to cacophony.

Whereas the problem for the old contrapuntalists was how to combine two or more "voices" within one embracing parent harmony, so to speak, while allowing to each as great a degree of independence and melodic interest as possible, the tendency of the modern contrapuntal school is to concentrate first upon the melodic line or lines, and then to find, if possible, a harmonic formula into which the various parts may be somehow squeezed. It is probable that if our ears could ever be trained to follow each "voice" separately—and Schönberg's music, for example, really pre-supposes the possession of this faculty—much that at present sounds obscure or even cacophonous would then appear harmonious and clear. At any rate it is on these lines that music is progressing, and our ears will somehow have to adapt themselves to the new demands which are being made upon them.

They have done so in the past, and there seems to be no good reason for supposing that the limit of their capacities has yet been reached. Moreover, if, as we have already tried to show, this striving towards complete harmonic freedom has resulted (and few will deny that it has) in a remarkable increase in the expressive powers of music, the modern movement will not have been in vain.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN SONG-WRITING

Harmonic emancipation has naturally led to a change in the technique of writing for both instruments and voices. The tendency to think "vertically" instead of "horizontally," which is the characteristic of the harmonic as opposed to the contrapuntal school, results inevitably in a certain sacrifice of melodic interest in the individual parts, both in vocal and instrumental writing. It is no exaggeration to say that present-day methods of writing for the voice have completely revolutionised vocal technique. These methods, however, are not merely due to harmonic considerations; they correspond to that desire to increase the expressive powers of music to which we have already referred as being the real motive force of all recent innovations in musical technique. And as the human voice is generally considered to be an "expressive" instrument *par excellence*, modern composers have naturally endeavoured to enlarge its expressive powers as much as possible. This they have pro-

ceeded to do, paradoxically enough as it may seem, at first sight, by "demusicalising" the voice, i.e., by insisting upon its essential nature as an organ, not of song, but of speech. I mean by this that the characteristic of much vocal writing, from Moussorgsky, through Debussy, down to Schönberg and Stravinsky, is the tendency to discourage pure singing, and to make the voice part a kind of rhythmic recitation. On the one hand this practice may certainly be considered as a simple reaction against the conventional florid vocal style of former epochs, when the sense of the words was frequently lost sight of under a mass of irrelevant ornament, and accents were ruthlessly displaced, or ignored altogether. But it is also the natural result of an increasing interest in, and preoccupation with literature on the part of modern musicians, and of a desire to be scrupulously faithful to the author's text. The introduction of "vers libre" also allowed for a corresponding relaxation of form in musical settings, and prose is now frequently "set." Compare the "Histoires Naturelles" of Ravel, or the "Socrate" of Satie, the text

of which consists of extracts from Victor Cousin's translation of Plato's "Symposium," "Phædrus," and "Phædo." Both these works are interesting examples of the modern style of writing for the voice. In the "Histoires Naturelles" the piano accompaniment provides the colour and atmosphere of each sketch, while the voice part is often little more than a kind of recitation. In "Socrate" the vocal line represents the rise and fall and the inflections of the voice of a person reading aloud, lightly supported by a deliberately exiguous accompaniment, in which it will be vain to seek for "dramatic" or highly-coloured passages. None the less, by its very sobriety and restraint the music throws into admirable relief the beauty of the text, and is truly Greek in its avoidance of exaggeration. The death of Socrates, for example, is a model of the narrative style in music, and how poignant, and, at the same time, how discreet is the suggestion of tragedy evoked by the reiteration throughout some twenty bars of the toll-like chords of A (minor) and B (minor) with the third omitted. From the point of view of prosody, "Socrate"

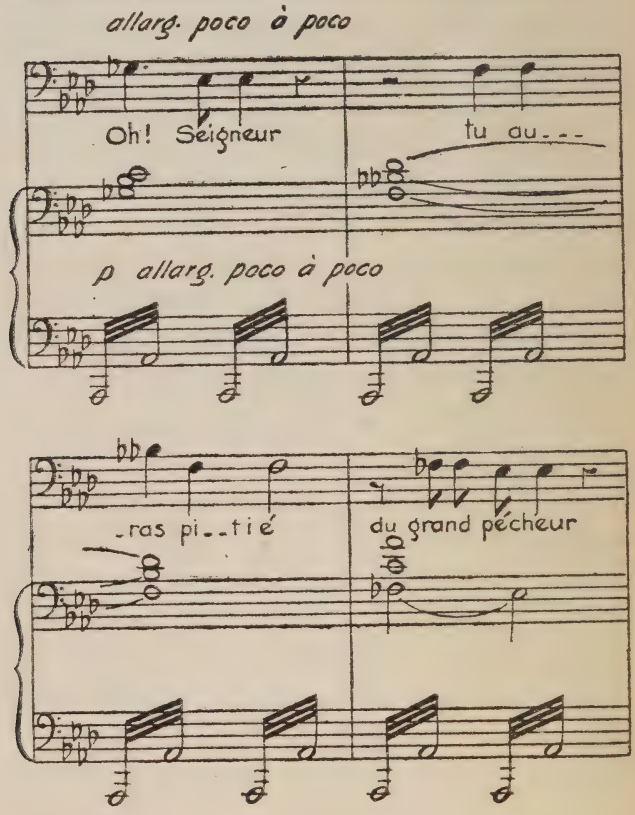
also presents several points of interest. It is surprising that the composer has been able to set the continuous narrative prose with so few changes of time-signature. Each of the three parts, in fact, is written throughout in (respectively) 2/4, 6/8, and common time, without any, even temporary, deviation into other rhythms. The prose has been poured into the mould prepared for it, as it were, apparently without difficulty; but how much art does this "apparently" conceal! The natural inflections of the voice have also been preserved to a remarkable degree.

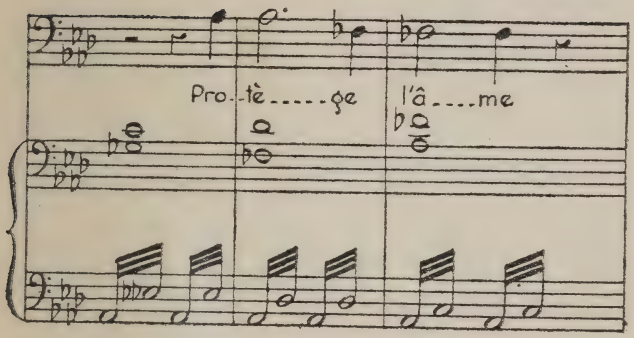
The question of preserving the natural inflections of the speaking voice in singing is one with which musicians have long been concerned from the time of Monteverde and Gluck down to that of Moussorgsky, Debussy, and the moderns, although there have been periods when no attention at all was given to this important question. The vocal writings of Moussorgsky in particular are very instructive in this respect; it was indeed one of the basic principles of Moussorgsky's æsthetic creed to depart as little as possible from the natural

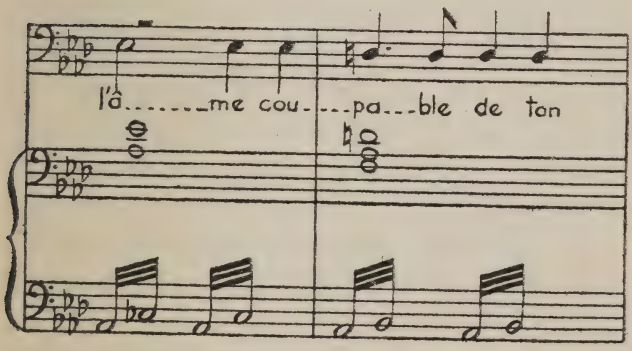
inflections of human speech when writing music to be sung. It is his fidelity to this principle which undoubtedly gives to so much of the vocal writing of the composer of "Boris Godounow" its peculiar "directness" and convincing "human" character. The fact that Moussorgsky was frequently his own librettist is significant; no doubt the words as they shaped themselves in his brain were already accompanied by their musical accentuation. In his "La Chambre d'Enfants"—that astonishing series of miniatures which are masterpieces of their kind—Moussorgsky has not only succeeded in packing each one of these little sketches as full as can be with pure musical delight, but he has imitated with remarkable success the most minute inflections of a child's voice. And what contributes largely to the grandeur of "Boris" is the unforced natural treatment of the human voice, a method from which, even at the most passionate moments, the composer never departs.

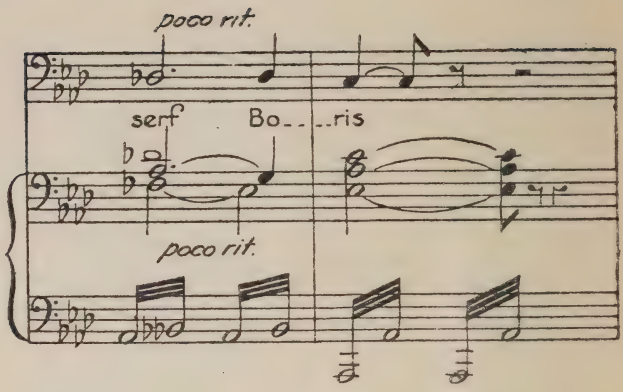
The carillon scene in "Boris" (Act II) may be instanced as an example of Moussorgsky's dramatic vocal style. The vocal part contains

no wild outbursts—throughout it is a model of restrained writing, and yet the utmost freedom is left to the singer to convey to the full an expression of horror. Cf. the closing words of Boris in this scene :—(Ex. 7)




Pro-tè-ge l'â-me


l'â-me cou-pa-ble de ton



The technical device of the descending semitones might appear to be almost childishly simple, but as a musical transcription of the effect of exhaustion and despair it succeeds triumphantly, because it is close to nature and therefore rings undeniably true.

In " Pelléas et Mélisande " the same scruple to preserve the natural inflections of the voice is noticeable, and in this respect Debussy goes even further than Moussorgsky. For while the latter still preserves a well-marked melodic line in almost all his vocal writing, including opera, Debussy in " Pelléas " and (as we shall see later) in his later lyrical compositions, practically abandons melody altogether.

As an example of the "parlando" style, the letter scene in Act I, Scene 2, of "Pelléas," beginning "Un soir je l'ai trouvée tout en pleurs au bord d'une fontaine," will repay the closest study, and much could be learnt from this passage alone of the art of setting words to music. The accentuation is flawless, and the vocal line as supple as the natural inflections of the speaking voice.

While, therefore, the essentially "naturalistic" or "realist" character of Moussorgsky's vocal compositions is in striking contrast to the more artificial, but yet exquisitely sensitive and refined methods of Debussy, the genius of the latter is nowhere more evident than when it is applied to the delicate task of translating into music the subtleties and beauties of Verlaine's poetry or Maeterlinck's prose. Debussy's settings of Verlaine are unsurpassed in their own particular style. No other composer has ever reproduced in music with such complete success the very perfume and ambiance of a literary text. The process can only be described as a kind of alchemy—something akin to the transmutation of metals. "Les

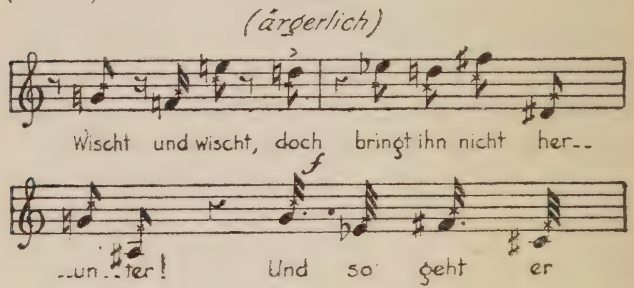
Ingénus" (1904) is a perfect example of this almost magical identity between the poet's and the musician's imagination. "Colloque Sentimental" (1904) is another marvellous evocation of a particular mood or atmosphere, and is at the same time a good illustration of Debussy's vocal style. At this period he has already practically abandoned melody; his principal concern, one feels, is to do no violence to the text and to respect above all the laws of prosody. The accents are invariably true, and the vocal line, if somewhat fragmentary, is astonishingly supple. It is perhaps unnecessary to remark, in parenthesis, that these settings of Debussy offer many pitfalls to the unwary or inexperienced singer, as, in addition to the difficulties of intonation, there is the elusive rhythm to be mastered, and many nuances of tone to be acquired. In a word, a great demand is made upon the intelligence, and literary, as well as musical, sensibility of the interpreter.

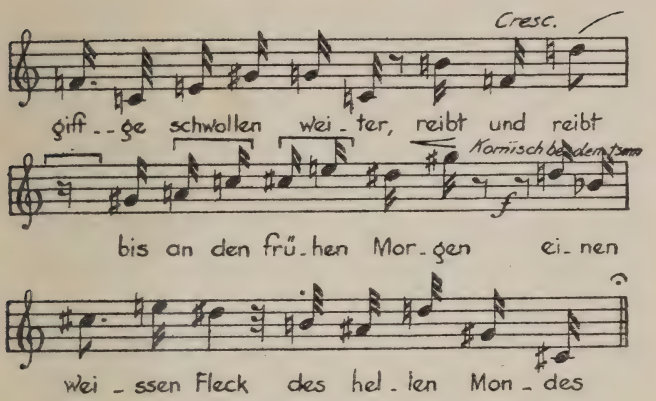
The abandonment of melody, in the ordinary sense of the word, is, as we have already remarked, one of the most salient features of

modern vocal writing. The word "song," in fact, can hardly be applied to much that is being written for the voice—at least, the use of this term is apt to be misleading. Moreover, there are signs of a still more radical revolt against the maintenance of even a singing "tone," a revolt which is being led by Schönberg, and of which "Pierrot Lunaire" (Op. 21) may be said to be the first fruits. In his preface to this work (which was composed as far back as 1910) Schönberg defines the task of the executants. The part written for the voice must be transformed into a "spoken melody" ("Sprechmelodie"), while at the same time the performer must adhere strictly to the written notes. The difference between a "sung note" and a "spoken note" is this: that whereas the former is held by the voice, the latter is merely indicated, and then abandoned by the voice in either an upward or downward direction. And yet Schönberg expressly directs that the performer must avoid any form of expression resembling either declamation or singing proper. The vocal part of the score is designated "Rezitation," and the effect in

performance is (or should be) that of a speaking voice which, though avoiding definitely musical notes, is yet observant of pitch and rhythm. The performer, in fact, must aim at producing a "speaking tone" ("Sprechton") midway between singing proper ("Gesangston") and declamation. The musical notes must nevertheless be indicated and the exact intervals observed, but in a "speaking" voice almost completely devoid of tone.

The following extract from No. 18 of the cycle ("Mondfleck") is typical of Schönberg's treatment of the voice throughout this work. (I quote the vocal part alone; the accompaniment is scored for piccolo, B flat clarinet, violin, violoncello and piano):—
(Ex. 8)




Cresc.
giff - ge schwollen wei - ter, reibt und reibt
Komisch bedeutsam
bis an den frü - hen Mor - gen ei - nen
wei - ssen Fleck des hel - len Mon - des

This is an innovation in vocal technique, the importance of which it is impossible to ignore. It is of course too soon to be able to pronounce upon the question as to whether such methods are likely to be universally adopted in the future. There is no doubt that a certain dramatic intensity is achieved by these means in this particular work, but it is open to question whether the net result is richer or more expressive than it would have been had use been made of the ordinary singing voice. At the same time the experiment was worth making and is suggestive in many ways. The whole gamut of the possibilities of the human voice has now been explored, ranging from

the most florid "fioriture" style, where the voice is treated as an instrument of virtuosity, down to the quasi-recitative of the modern French school, and thence to the "Sprechton" of "Pierrot Lunaire," after passing through the intermediate stages of Wagnerian declamation and the pure "lieder" style of the classic and romantic periods.

All we have tried to do in these pages is to indicate broadly on what lines the technique of song-writing has tended to develop in recent years. Modern composers have a large stock of styles from which to choose; as to what will be the predominating characteristic of the vocal music of the next hundred years, it will be for future historians to record.

CHAPTER V

MUSIC AND THE THEATRE: THE VOGUE OF BALLET

We remarked at the end of Chapter II that modern music is still literary in inspiration, but that the literature which inspires it has changed its character since the days of Symbolism. The change that has taken place in music—both as regards its aims and methods—is no less marked. On the technical side remarkable progress has been made, as we have seen, in the direction of complete harmonic emancipation, and at the same time a change has come over what may be called musical ideals. The general orientation of modern music is towards the theatre. The prevailing tendency is to write music to a text of some kind; there is scarcely a composer of note to-day who has not written for the stage. Not that opera is in the ascendant; on the contrary, this particular

art-form seems likely to disappear and to have been definitely superseded by the Ballet. No doubt the reason for the attraction of the theatre lies in the fact that modern composers feel the need of the co-operation of elements of a non-musical nature, but which yet act as additional stimuli to the imagination, and are coming more and more to rely upon external sources of inspiration.

The introduction of "ideas" into music was, as we have seen, the principal contribution of the nineteenth century. It was manifested, first of all, in the "Romantic" movement, and became especially marked with the advent of Wagnerian music-drama. Its next manifestation took the form of "programme-music" which having been perfected, if not invented,[1] by Liszt and Berlioz, reached its culminating point in the Tone-poems of Strauss and his imitators, and in the quasi-philosophic or mystical compositions of Scriabine. Chamber-

[1] Experiments in programme music in the strictly *imitative* sense had already been made by Bach and Beethoven; and the "Bible-Sonatas" (1700) of Johann Kuhnau, J. S. Bach's predecessor, are full of deliberately descriptive passages, e.g. "David and Goliath," etc.

music, as one of the "pure" forms *par excellence*, affords few examples of imitative or descriptive compositions; nevertheless, mention may be made of Schönberg's Sextet for strings (Op. 4) which is avowedly a musical interpretation of Richard Dehmel's poem "Verklärte Nacht"; and the string-quartet of Smetana, "Aus meinem Leben" has at least a suggestion of a "programme" which is not without some influence upon its form.

Within the last twenty years, however, a change has taken place. The "tone-poem" has passed out of fashion, and the pendulum has swung in the direction of the theatre once again—only this time towards a theatre purged of the conventions and "fustiness" attaching to "Grand Opera"—a plastic theatre, where ballet and pantomime enable artists to realise new effects of form and colour in scenery which has been stripped of the useless and stupid trappings of the old "realism," and simplified in accordance with the principles of modern art. Up to now the influence of the Ballet has been a stimulating one; to it we owe the creation of masterpieces such as "Petrouchka,"

"Le Sacre du Printemps," "Le Rossignol," and a number of other remarkable works such as Ravel's "Daphnis et Chloë," Roussel's "Le Festin de l'Araignée," De Falla's "The Three-Cornered Hat," Milhaud's "L'Homme et son Désir," the "Salomé" of Florent Schmitt, "Chout," by Prokofiev, Egon Wellesz's "Persian Ballet," Bartok's "The Wooden Prince," etc., etc. No doubt the Russian revelation—the revolutionary reforms introduced by Fokine and so admirably executed by his collaborators—was primarily responsible for the change in the current of twentieth century music. At one stroke the Ballet attained its apotheosis, and began to exercise a strange fascination over the minds of composers. Not one of them could rest until he, too, had laid his offering at the feet of proud Terpsichore. Future chroniclers, while laying stress upon the extraordinary recrudescence of dancing which marked the opening of the twentieth century, will certainly not fail to note the influence which this recrudescence had upon the music of the period.

What we have now to consider, however, is how far can this intimate connection between music and the dance be considered desirable, from a purely musical point of view, and to what limits can it be pushed without doing definite harm to both the arts concerned? This is a question which the musician will sooner or later have seriously to consider. To answer it, it will be necessary to examine the whole history of the art of dancing, and to endeavour to discover the principle governing the connection between dancing and music in the past.

It will generally be conceded that dancing, among primitive peoples, preceded music—at any rate as an independent art. It was the exigencies of the dance, the craving of the dancers for some tangible and well-marked rhythm, *external to themselves*, that first called into being the reed-pipe of the primitive Greek and the tom-tom of the African negro. Music's function originally was to supply rhythm—in other words, it was dynamic before it was melodic, and (incidentally) melodic before it was harmonic.

Afterwards, quite naturally, having grown up together in childhood, the two arts separated in their youth, each winning a glorious and fruitful independence.

In the case of music, this independence meant the evolution of an art of absolute sound, self-sufficing, and bound by none but specifically musical laws. In the case of the dance, independence meant the evolution of an art of movement, expressed by the movements of the human body, governed by certain physical and æsthetic principles, but aiming at nothing but a purely plastic perfection.[1] Dancing as an "end in itself," music as an "end in itself"—that was the "classic" spirit. It is noteworthy, however, that music and dancing are never so far apart as when they are most purely "classic." Modern dancing—civilised European dancing—hardly exists, it is true, without the accompaniment of music, but when the classic Ballet was

[1] I am conscious that this definition does not apply to many *primitive* forms of dance, e.g., Oriental or Spanish forms, which have always been, and still are, of an admittedly "expressive" nature. But we are now dealing exclusively with the highly developed and sophisticated forms of art accompanying material and intellectual progress.

triumphing in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the music written for it was not the music of composers like Mozart and Beethoven, but something of an altogether inferior quality of which the only *raison d'être* was to provide the dancers with suitable tunes to dance to. None the less the standard of pure dancing has never been higher than in the days of the classical Ballet, when Taglioni and Elssler and Vestris aimed at nothing but pure plastic perfection, and did not strive to "express" anything at all. As soon as expression enters, dancing becomes pantomime—i.e., the primary concern of the dancer is to "express," by means of the movements and attitudes of his body, ideas or emotions which he would normally express in words. To enable him to do this the rules of his art are necessarily relaxed in a greater or less degree, and the dance ceases to be an end in itself, and becomes a plastic medium for the expression of literary ideas or human emotions.[1]

[1] It must be understood that I am not here concerned with the superiority of the classic over the modern pantomimic ballet or *vice-versa*; each has its merits and there is no doubt that both kinds are equally "legitimate." My object is merely to point out where they differ.

Here the same process is at work as we noted in the transition from "classical" to "romantic" music. The reign of individualism in art has begun—the artist feels the need to "express" himself; he is personal where the classic is impersonal, and tends to look upon his art as a medium rather than as an end in itself.

The net result is that, in proportion as music and dancing abandon the isolation imposed by classicism, the more they tend to meet each other on a common ground. This is precisely the position to-day.

Ever since the "Romantic" and "Realist" movements began, the barriers between the arts have gradually been broken down. Art has been made commensurate with life, and the various branches of art have begun to overlap. Poets paint "word-pictures"; painters compose "symphonies"; composers write "tone-poems." Each art claims the whole field of human experience as its own. The effect of all this on music has been very marked. We have had the "Domestic symphony" (realistic music), "Zarathustra" (philosophic music),

"Don Quixote" (literary music) all from the pen of one composer. Then came the Russian Ballet of Diaghilew, with its intoxicating blend of dancing, colour and sound, and finally Scriabine, who dreamed of a Temple of Art in which symphonies of scents and sounds would be mingled with manifestations of colour and movement.

A reaction against all this was inevitable, and that reaction has now begun. Sobriety is now the note in modern art. Even the Russian Ballet has gone back to Tschaikovsky and the classic choreography of Marius Petipas. Some of the most celebrated productions of the Russian Ballet, it is true, have been those based upon an independent musical score not specially composed for ballet purposes: e.g., "Scheherazade," "Thamar," "Carnival," "Les Sylphides" (a potpourri of Chopin); but these do not affect the attitude of the composer *vis-à-vis* the ballet in any way. On the other hand, works such as "Petrouchka," "Le Sacre du Printemps," "Daphnis et Chloë," are the result of a definite collaboration between composer and choreographer. So, for that matter,

is the "Sleeping Princess," which Tschaikovsky wrote especially for the old Imperial Ballet at St. Petersburg. But whereas the music of the "Sleeping Princess" is obviously ballet-music, and if played alone would sound unbearably trivial, the interest of "Petrouchka" or "Daphnis and Chloë" is at least as much musical as choreographic.

So long, then, as the composer preserves his independence, he risks little in writing ballet music on the free modern lines to which we are now accustomed. But let him beware of becoming the ballet-master's servant. We have seen how small was the rôle of the musician who ministered to the needs of the Ballet at its most flourishing epochs; is it not conceivable that the Ballet of the future may claim once more a greater independence, and endeavour to detach itself from the allurements of a too vigorous and self-assertive musical accompaniment?

CHAPTER VI

THE MODERN SPIRIT: THE CASE OF ERIK SATIE

In the meantime certain innovations in the art of the Ballet claim our attention, and in this connection Erik Satie's "Parade," and several of the scenic productions of the group of young French composers known as the "Six," notably "Le Bœuf sur le Toit," and "Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel," are deserving of special mention, as they embody in a very pronounced way some of the most striking tendencies of modern musical and scenic conceptions. M. Jean Cocteau, the author of the Ballet "Parade," to which Satie wrote music in which, in the words of M. Cocteau, "he seems to have discovered an unknown dimension, thanks to which one can listen simultaneously both to the 'parade' (the scene represents a booth at a fair) and to the show

going on inside,"[1] explains as follows the nature of the problem with which he was concerned when composing the choreography of this remarkable and suggestive ballet:—"... the problem was to take a series of natural gestures and to metamorphose them into a dance without depriving them of their realistic force, as a modern painter seeks his inspiration in natural objects in order to metamorphose them into pure painting, but without losing sight of the force of their volume, substance, colour and shade."[2]

And again:—"the awkwardness of movement underneath those wooden frames (the 'Managers') far from hampering the choreographer, obliged him to break with ancient formulæ, and to seek his inspiration, not in things that move, but in things round which we move, and which move according to the rhythm of our steps."[3]

It is this passionate attachment to common things and "commonplaces" as the subject-

[1] "Le Coq et l'Arlequin." Paris: Ed. de la Sirène. (1918.) [English trans. by R. H. Myers. London: Egoist Press. (1921.)]
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

matter of art—"cette obsession de réalité irréelle," as Cocteau describes it—which is the distinctive feature of the modern spirit. "Ainsi appelai-je 'Parade,'" he says, "ballet-réaliste, voulant dire par là: plus vrai que le vrai . . ."[1]

The same search after the true reality underlying what is generally called "reality" is manifest in "Le Bœuf sur le Toit," and in a more marked degree in "Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel." In the former it is impossible not to be struck by the peculiar effect of the painted masks, and by the slow movements of the actors in contrast with the restless rhythms of the music in which Darius Milhaud has sought, by the use of rag-rhythms, to evoke the exotic yet intensely human atmosphere of the Bar and its inhabitants. In "Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel" this insistence upon trivialities, resulting in a kind of apotheosis of the commonplace, creates in the end a kind of super-reality, which, though seemingly fantastic, only appears so owing to a process some-

[1] "Le Secret Professionnel." Librairie Stock, Paris (1922).

what similar to that of winding a film unduly fast in order to distort the movements of the actors on the screen. We know all the time that their movements are really normal, in spite of what we see upon the screen, and similarly, we feel the reality and humanness underlying the apparently extravagant absurdities of " Les Mariés." The poet wishes us to feel, in fact, the strange force and *freshness* of the commonplace, and this he succeeds in doing by magnifying it a hundredfold and presenting it to us in such a way that we feel we are looking at it for the first time. In this way we can have the emotions usually associated with exoticism without quitting the firm land of everyday reality. But it requires an artist to work this spell upon us, and the secret of this particular spell is not possessed by many. When it succeeds the results may be altogether surprising; when it fails they will probably be absurd.

In any case we are here in the presence of a particularly and characteristically " modern " trait. Art is becoming commensurate with life; it finds its subject-matter in a bar or in a

railway-train as readily as in a sunset or a sacrifice. The "sublime," with all its stylistic conventions, is out of date, or rather any theme may be considered potentially sublime. It depends on the angle from which it is approached. Above all the "artistic" vocabulary has been abolished—in painting, poetry, and music alike—and stylistic conventions reduced to a minimum. This is one of the greatest triumphs of modern art. If he is to express his epoch truly, the modern artist must do so in terms of his surroundings, and therefore lifts and aeroplanes, motor-cars and jazz-bands, must naturally enter into the poetry, painting, and music of to-day—not to the exclusion of other themes, but enjoying equal rights with them. Obviously this privilege may be abused—it often is—but bad art has always existed, and the canons of good taste are not affected by mere changes in technique. Social codes of manners change with each century, and are different in every country, but the absolute standard of "good manners" remains. And so it is in art. In spite of this fact, however, many would-be

artists, aping the methods of genuine creators and mistaking the means for the end, imagine that by indulging freely in the modern *vocabulary* (no matter whether in painting, poetry or music) their works will stand a chance of being mistaken for the genuine article.

If this occurs, it is the fault of an undiscriminating public. One often hears the complaint that "all this modern music sounds the same," etc. The fault is in the listener's ears. A work of art in the twentieth century is "good" or "bad" for exactly the same reasons as it was in the fifteenth—in other words, it is either a genuine work of art or it is not. The public is apt to judge by non-essentials. Whether it is expressed in "modern" terminology or not is irrelevant; the critic must look deeper. The canons of good and bad in art remain substantially the same. Thus "Le Sacre du Printemps" is just as great a work of art as the "St. Matthew Passion"; but there are many other compositions one could mention, equally "modern" in appearance, to which one would not think of applying the epithet "great" at all. In a

word, "fine feathers do not make fine birds," and if that was true in the past it is equally true of the present. Hence there is no excuse, as we have already remarked, for the people who say that "all modern music sounds the same." If they are unable to detect the true from the false in modern art, it is more than doubtful whether they are capable of doing so where ancient art is concerned; and yet, in nine cases out of ten, these are the very people who profess a fervent admiration for the art of the past, which they are always comparing with the art of to-day, to the marked disadvantage of the latter. We may console ourselves with the reflection that, after all, they are just as likely to choose a bad ancient model as they are to overlook a good modern one, and that, when all is said and done, bad critics have never yet had any influence on good art.

The *vocabulary* of modern music, then, like the modern poetic vocabulary, has been enriched in various ways, and shews the influence of various phenomena of everyday life. We may distinguish three sources of inspiration which have left their mark upon

contemporary music: (1) "Rag-time" dances, negro melodies and other importations from America; (2) Folk-music; and (3) Fairs and puppet-shows and other popular manifestations. In Class 1 may be placed "Piano Rag Music" by Stravinsky, "Le Bœuf sur le Toit" (Milhaud) and many of the lesser compositions of the "Six"; in Class 2 the works of, e.g., Bartok, Vaughan Williams, De Falla, etc.; and in Class 3 works such as "Petrouchka" or "Parade."

One composer has even gone so far as to set the words of a catalogue of agricultural implements to music (Darius Milhaud in "Machines Agricoles"), and Erik Satie has written what is called "la musique d'ameublement"—that is to say, a musical pattern which repeats itself continually like the pattern of a wall-paper, and which is intended to "furnish" space for the benefit of the ear in the same way that the wall-paper decorates the wall for the benefit of the eye. And this brings us to a consideration of a fourth characteristic of modern music—namely, a certain cultivation of the grotesque.

There exists undoubtedly a certain prejudice against humorous music, in spite of the fact that the grotesque has been cultivated by many composers of first rank, such as Moussorgsky, Debussy, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss, etc., while among the classics, Haydn was not above a joke at times, and Scarlatti wrote a famous fugue, the theme of which was suggested to him by a cat.

A set of Variations by Alexandro Poglietti, who died in 1683, contains a "Procession of Old Women," a "Polish Fencing Divertissement," and a "Canzone" which imitates the cackling of cocks and hens, and abounds in strident discords.

Moussorgsky's "Song of the Flea" and certain passages in "Don Quixote" or "Till Eulenspiegel" are essays in the grotesque, but they are masterpieces in their way.

The existence of this element in music, both old and modern, is merely additional proof of the universal nature of art. "Humani nihil a me alienum puto," said Terence—and the motto of a dramatist may well be that of a musician too.

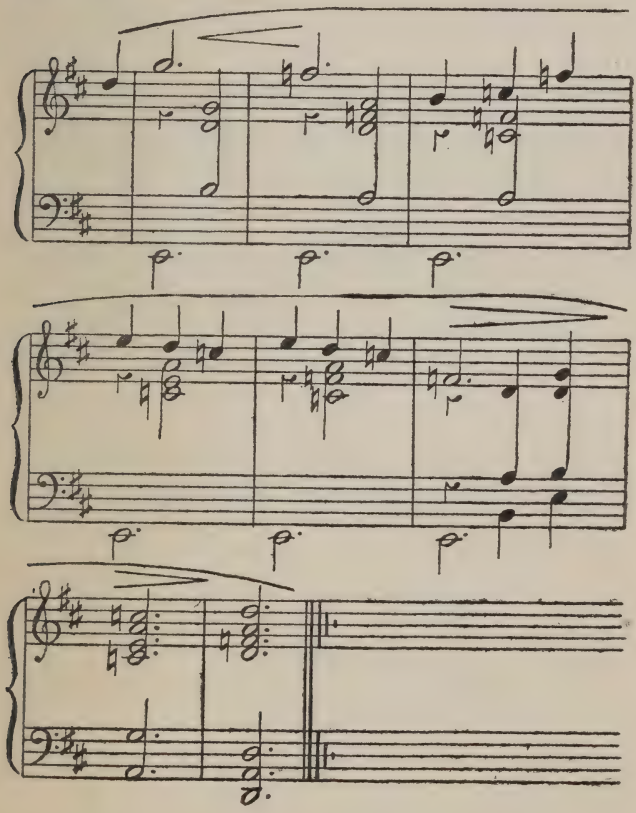
Among the moderns the composer whose name is most closely associated with so-called "humorous" music is probably Erik Satie. It was the fashion to speak of Schönberg as a "Futurist" in music. What adjective, then, can most fittingly be applied to the original genius of men like Satie?

Many, no doubt, will be impelled to dismiss his music as being merely "blague," an attitude which is perhaps in some degree invited by the composer's fondness of bizarre titles, and his practice of writing on his scores a running commentary of ejaculations and admonitions to the performer. "Embryons Desséchés," "Morceaux en forme d'une poire," "Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)," "Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois," "Avant-Dernières Pensées," "Air à faire fuir," and "Danse de travers (Pièces Froides)"—titles such as these are clearly calculated either to repel the fastidious or attract the curious. The irony underlying the use of such titles may, however, fail to be appreciated unless it be remembered that Satie was deliberately parodying the use of

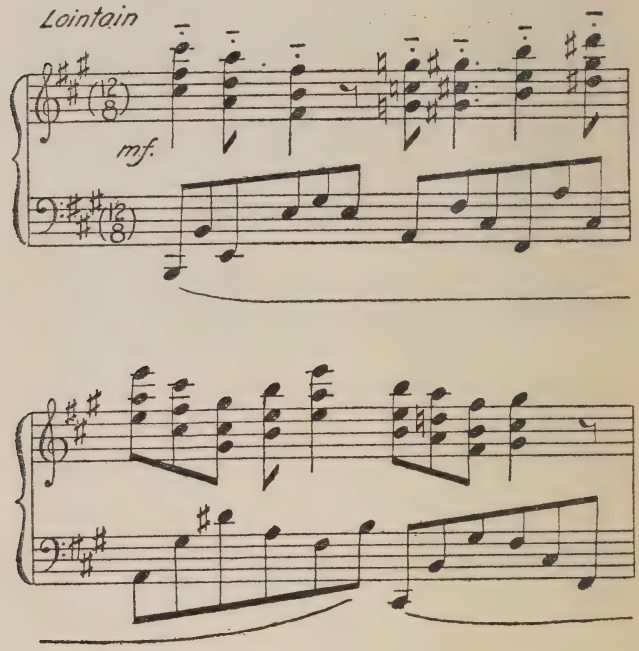
"precious" titles, *à la* Debussy, such as: "Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut," etc., and also, perhaps, the no less extravagant titles attached to some of Couperin's best-known works, e.g., "Le tic-toc-choc ou les Maillotins," "Les coucous bénévoles," or "Les vieux galants et les Tresorières surannées." The later works of Satie are, however, free from all eccentricities, e.g., "Socrate" and the Six "Nocturnes" for piano (1919). So are the charming "Gymnopédies" and the "Gnossiennes," though dating from an earlier period. Satie attains sometimes to a classic elegance and purity of style; witness the first "Gymnopédie" (which Debussy orchestrated) beginning thus:—

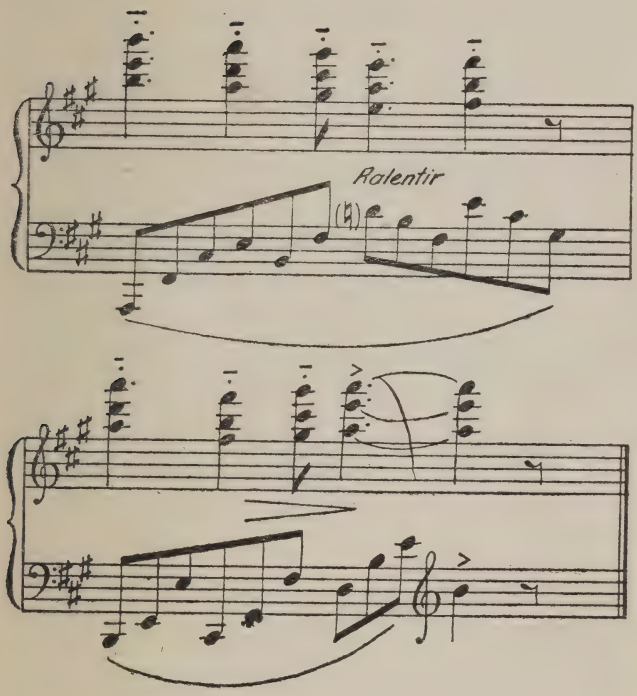
(Ex. 9)

and note especially the quiet beauty of the concluding phrase with the soft modal cadence :— (Ex. 10)



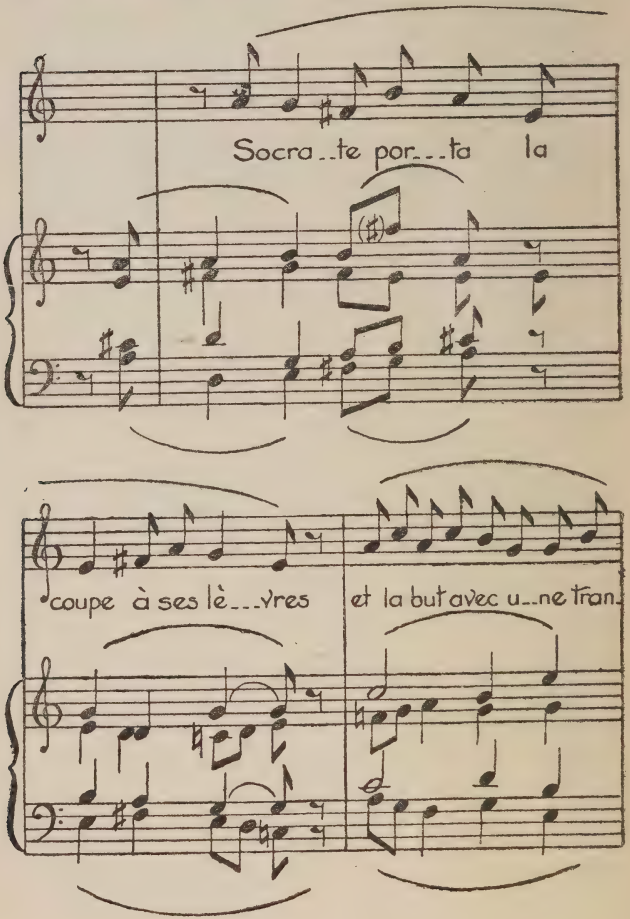
and again this extract from the 4th "Nocturne," with its interesting harmonic progressions and easy flowing movement:— (Ex. 11)





By the use of almost purely diatonic harmonies Satie is also able to obtain effects of great beauty, and nowhere has he risen to greater heights than in the following passage in the "Death of Socrates" ("Socrate," Part III., p. 62, piano version, Ed. La Siréne,

Paris) so tender and profound in its quiet simplicity and limpidity of style :—(Ex. 12)



It would be idle to pretend that all that Satie has written is on this level, but enough

has perhaps been said to shew that his art, though embracing a somewhat limited field, is yet governed by a definite philosophy and is the conscious expression of a definite ideal. Briefly, the music of Satie is a revolt against the over-complex, the over-burdened, the over-sentimental, the over-passionate, the over-luscious, the over-sonorous music of the last two centuries, and is the expression of a desire for simplicity in outline, brevity in statement, and clarity in conception. It is for this reason that to ears sated with the febrile sonorities of modern orchestras and rich and recherché harmonies, the slender reed of a Satie, weaving a tenuous two-part counterpoint instinct with angular and dissonant harmonies, must often seem not merely dry and "gauche" but positively absurd. His music has line, however, and the enormous merit of condensation. It is devoid of trappings and useless decoration, and when it has no more to say it stops. Simplification here, as in cubism, has been seemingly pushed as far as it will go.

This is an age of experimentation and a future generation will perhaps be in a position

to judge these manifestations of the questing spirit in art better than our own; it is, however, the function of criticism to "constater" before passing judgment, to explain what is trying to be done before declaring it not to be worth doing.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The conclusions arrived at in the course of this short survey of modernism in music may perhaps be summed up as follows:

We have seen that music has steadily advanced towards an ideal of equality with other branches of art, and with human culture generally. We have seen how its technique has rapidly evolved, and how the old crippling conventions have now all been discarded. We have seen to what use this new-won freedom has been put, and have examined a few of the more striking characteristics of the modern movement, as manifested in the works of contemporary composers. These characteristics we have found to be (1) preoccupation with literary and scenic ideas; (2) exotic or ephemeral influences, such as those exercised by dance rhythms *à la mode*; (3) a certain cultivation

of the grotesque; (4) a reaction against the precious and over-complex in favour of simplicity, robustness and realism; (5) a tendency to treat all natural phenomena, and all mental or sense experience, as being of equal interest and importance to the artist. It is this last trait which M. Jean Epstein[1] explains by his theory of the "plan intellectuel unique." According to this theory, "everything—thoughts and acts, ideas and sensations, to-day and to-morrow and yesterday, previsions and certitudes and reminiscences, are all thrown together, side by side, on the same (mental) screen." Hence the "suggestive disorder" of much modern literature—an apparent disorder, which is due to a relaxation of the selective faculty, everything which enters the brain, and which is even remotely connected with the subject-matter of the moment, being retained by the artist and transferred to the paper in its crude state. In the words of M. Epstein :—"Since there may exist in the brain

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[1] "La Poésie d'aujourd'hui : un nouvel état d'intelligence" (Paris : Editions de la Sirène).

simultaneously, or at least in very rapid succession, the perception of a 'thing,' a comparison of that 'thing' with another very dissimilar idea, an analogy, a metaphor, an old memory, more or less directly connected with this 'thing,' a perception of colour, or sound, or taste, coinciding in time with the perception of the 'thing' in question, but otherwise unconnected with it—why not reproduce faithfully all the salient features of this intellectual picture?" This, precisely, is what the modern artist does. He is not interested in the 'thing' itself—"he does not see the 'thing' but only his own intellectual attitude towards the 'thing.'" And it is his own mental state which he then proceeds to describe, and which he embodies in a poem, a picture or a symphony. And this is why so much modern art seems charged with allusions and reminiscences, which confer upon it a peculiar power of suggestion and evocation, which often seems to touch some hidden chord deep in the sub-conscious self of the listener or spectator. For just as the artist has drawn upon his sub-conscious self for the purpose of

creation, so must we draw upon our own if we wish to understand and appreciate fully what the artist has tried to express. We are, in fact, in the presence of a deliberate cult of the sub-conscious in art.

For there can be little doubt that the modern artist does deliberately exploit his own sub-conscious or sub-liminal self. That is to say, the conscious *ego* is temporarily deposed in favour of the sub-conscious, but in such a way that the conscious self is made to keep watch upon the sub-conscious, and take note of all its promptings. It is this strange collaboration which may account for much that seems at first sight inexplicable or irrelevant in modern art. It is in any case the accepted explanation of "Dadaïsm," which was simply the cult of the sub-conscious pushed to its logical conclusion. Without going to those lengths, however (which can only lead to an inarticulate state), there is no reason why the sub-conscious self should not be called upon to play its part in artistic creation. If there is any meaning in "inspiration" it is probably this—that the artist, at the moment of creation, submerges his

conscious self, and allows his sub-conscious self free play. Not unrestricted free play (that way Dadaïsm lies) but a certain licence, which the conscious self will know how to control and how to turn to the best account.

While this process is naturally most evident in literature (and especially in the works of such writers as Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau, Marcel Proust, Paul Morand, Louis Aragon, James Joyce, etc.) there are abundant traces of a similar tendency both in the painting and music of to-day.

In music, the evidence of any particular psychological process is naturally of an indirect rather than a direct nature : this is due to the fact that music is the most intangible of all the arts—the least determinate and the least logical, perhaps, but the most suggestive. It is rare to find two people upon whom music (even the same piece of music) produces an identical effect, for here is an art which is essentially subjective. It has first to be filtered through an individual consciousness before it can be said to have an independent

objective existence of its own; and the more varieties of consciousness or temperaments there are, the more varied will be its appeal. Music is the most Protean of all the arts, rivalling the chameleon in its readiness to react to every "colour" in the temperamental spectrum of its listeners. The general character of the emotion aroused in the listener is, of course, more or less determined by the emotion which inspired the composer, but nothing can determine the exact nature of the listener's reaction to the music, or the way in which he will be affected by the actual sounds. In some cases these sounds will be translated into images (here the visual faculty is stronger than the purely auditive)—in others, into intellectual conceptions, in others, into sentimental abstractions, and so on. In a word, the effect of music upon a given individual is determined in the first place by the psychic disposition of that individual—knowledge, culture, experience only come into play as auxiliaries to the primary sensuous impression. Certainly they will add to the sum total of the effect produced, and probably influence the quality of the

æsthetic enjoyment, but an entirely ignorant and illiterate person, unused even to the society of human beings, might conceivably be just as profoundly affected by music as the most cultured "melomane." "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast" expresses a psychological and physical fact. Now this could not be said of painting or even of literature. To understand a picture or a book the reader or spectator must possess a certain amount of culture and know some *facts* about the subject-matter with which the artist or writer is dealing. In music (absolute music that is) the subject matter is *nil*; form and content are one, and the medium, sound, is of the same intangible texture as our dreams.

The one strength of the composer of music lies in his power to suggest, to evoke, and to arouse emotions, but he can only do this indirectly, owing to the nature of the medium in which he works. Resemblance and logic, which are the backbone of painting and literature, can play no part in an art whose function it is to express the inexpressible. Methods may change, but the essential nature

of music remains unchanged. Whether we are listening to Bach or to Stravinsky we are being conducted to the brink of the unknown and allowed to peep behind the mysterious veil; one will lead us by the right hand, and the other by the left, but it is immaterial which corner we lift first: the ultimate revelation will be the same.

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